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ABSTRACT

This report delineates the value systems that influenced the activities of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Declining Enrollments (CACDE) in making decisions on issues introduced by declining enrollment in the district. The following sets of values were seen as influencing the activities of the CACDE members and the later votes and reactions of the school committee members: concern for school quality (basic skills), concern for school quality (enrichment), concern for total school cost, concern for staff disruption, concern for the neighborhood school, concern for equality of school facilities within the community, and concern for social action. The values approach used seems to provide an understanding of the dynamics of school policy decision-making not only in declining enrollment problems but in other areas as well. By plotting people and committee members into a value-space, it is possible to see groupings and to detect expected coalitions. (Author/IRT)

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POSITIONS ON DECLINING ENROLLMENT ISSUES AND SCHOOL VALUES COMMITMENT

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Positions on Declining Enrollment Issues and School Values Committment

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Decision-making in school settings has never been easy, nor has the process of decision-making been especially well understood. The present paper presents a case history of decision-making on one set of issues in one community, and attempts to develop a more general approach to understanding community decision-making.

The community involved is an upper-middle class community with a population of about 88,000 with about 16,000 of them children in the public school system. This community is noted nationally for the excellence of its school system. However, while having an average upper middle class population, the community is in fact a city with quite different sections and many areas with stable working class populations. Further the city has significant proportions of its population holding three major religious persuasions. Historically the city grew out of a set of separate villages each with their own history and population dynamics.

The issue under study is that of declining enrollment and the decision making process which the community went through to deal with it. The birthrate has been falling since 1967 both nationally and in our community. 1967 was the peak enrollment year for this community with 18,424 students enrolled in the public school system that year. As of October, 1975 the enrollment had been declining for eigh consecutive years reaching a low of 15,842. This is 14 percent below the 1967 peak. The loss over the eight year period has been 2,582 pupils.

In this town the school system consisted of 23 elementary schools, each going from Kindergarten to grade Six, five junior high schools covering the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth grades and two senior high schools covering grades Ten, Eleven and Twelve. Children living more than a mile and a half from school were bused to school. Very few elementary pupils were bused, about half of the junior high school students and a majority of the senior high school students were eligible for busing.

The decline in enrollment was much stronger at the elementary level where the decline over the eight year period has been 21 percent or 2,113 pupils since the peak enrollment of 10,011 in 1961. At the junior high school level the peak year was 1966 with steady declines since then, now totalling 14 percent below the 1966 peak. On the other hand the high school enrollment reached a peak in 1969 and has only dropped some six percent since then.

Predicted declines in the next four years are for 13 additional percent drop at the elementary level, an additional nine percent decline at the junior high level and an additional 12 percent decline at the senior high level.

Faced with these facts and projections, the School Committee decided to establish a Citizens Advisory Committee to be charged with gathering additional information and with suggesting for the School Committee's consideration various alternatives for dealing with the issues introduced by declining enrollments. The Citizens Advisory Committee on Declining Enrollment (CACDE) was to hold all its meetings open to the public and to consult with all representatives of the community including parents, teachers, and administrators.

The CACDE was composed of a Chairman appointed by the Chairman of the School Committee; six representatives from the Parent Teachers Association Council, two each from the North, Central and Southern sections of the city; two members from the teachers association; one from each of the following: a local Citizens for Education Organization, the League of Women Voters, a local Black Citizens group, the local Taxpayers Association, and the Community School Council for a total of 14 members.

The CACDE met on a weekly basis from September 1974 through the middle of March, 1975 and submitted a 144 page report to the School Committee on March 13, 1975. For the 14 member committee, average attendance at the weekly meetings averaged just a shade under 13, with most of the absenteeism accounted for by the representative from the Black Citizen's group. Interest in the Committee's activities was quite high, with newspaper stories reporting on its activities almost every week. Public hearings held by the Committee drew as many as 300 citizens with as many as twenty formal presentations to the Committee.

The purpose of this report is not to give a blow-by-blow recounting of the Committee's actions and the later effects of this issue on the School Committee, but rather to delineate the value systems which seemed to have been called forth by this attempt at community decision-making. The viewpoint presented here is that of the author, who served as a member of the committee and may have his perceptions influenced as well as informed by that experience.

Value Systems

The following sets of values were seen as influencing the activities of the CACDE members, and also as influencing the later votes and reactions of the School Committee members.

The seven values used in this analysis were developed to understand the positions of the committee members and to explain how they would argue and vote on the many propositions developed during the committee's deliberations. The issue of "school quality" dogged the committee throughout its work since it was so difficult for people to agree on what "school quality" meant. By dividing the concept into two components, "basic skills" and "enrichment" it was possible for the author to begin to understand the various positions and values of the committee members.

1. Concern for School Quality (Basic Skills) - Essentially a person who highly values or is greatly concerned with "School Quality - Basic Skills" feels that the schools should be working hard on maintaining or improving the learning of basic skills by the students. A person with a high concern for basic skills would want to maintain or improve the schools' capacity to impart basic skills of reading, spelling, writing, and mathematical operations to the students. A person with a low concern for basic skills would feel that while basic skills are important, the schools already do a good enough job in this area and that other areas of school functioning are of greater concern.

2. Concern for School Quality (Enrichment) - A person who is highly concerned with the Enrichment aspect of school quality feels that the essence of a high quality school system is the availability of opportunities for children such as art classes, science laboratories, culturally relevant field trips, libraries and media centers, nature trips and other enrichment experiences. A person who has a low concern for the Enrichment aspect of school quality feels that while these experiences are important, there are other aspects of school functioning which are of greater concern.

3. Concern for Total School Cost - A person highly concerned with the Total School Cost is aware of the impact of the school system costs on the total city tax rate and is aware of the fact that people without children in the schools also have to bear the cost of school operations. A highly concerned person is especially concerned that no funds are wasted and that full value is received for funds spent. A person who has a low concern for total school cost recognizes that while costs are a factor, other aspects of the school system functioning are of greater concern.

4. Concern for Staff Disruption - People high on this concern understand that some possible actions might have the effect of reducing the number of jobs for teachers or administrators, reducing the opportunities for advancement, or otherwise disrupting school staff. People high on this concern feel that the morale of teachers and school staffs would be very negatively affected by such staff disruptions. They feel that staff disruptions should be minimized even if other aspects of the school system functioning would have to be given lower priorities. People low on the concern for Staff Disruption realize that it may be necessary to take actions which will cause some staff disruption but that other aspects of the school system functioning need to be considered first.

5. Concern for the Neighborhood School - People high on this concern feel that it is important that each neighborhood have an elementary school to which the neighborhood children can walk. Such a neighborhood school helps to maintain property values and the school facilities such as its auditorium, can enhance the activities of neighborhood groups of all ages. People low on the concern for the neighborhood school recognize its value, but also feel that other aspects of the functioning of the school system

need to be considered first.

6. Concern for Equality of School Facilities within the Community - People high on this concern are bothered by having some elementary schools with science laboratories, photographic darkrooms, hot-lunch cafeterias, two-station gymnasiums, art rooms and such if all schools could not have them. People high on this concern feel that, within the city, the facilities available to each elementary school should be substantially equal. People low on this concern feel that while it would be good for each school to have equivalent facilities, there are other aspects of the functioning of the school system which should be considered first.

7. Concern for Social Action - People high on this concern feel that the schools should assist in the major social issues of the day, such as reducing racial tensions and bringing about greater equal status contact between Black and White, Rich and Poor, and otherwise easing the social tensions of modern society. People low on the concern for social action feel that while these actions are important, there are other aspects of the functioning of the school system which should be considered first.

With these seven values defined, it was possible to rate each of the fourteen members of the CACDE on each of these concerns. Table 1 presents the ratings of the committee members on the seven value concerns. These values presented were the mean ratings made by three members of the committee. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance for the three raters was .41.

Table 1

Ratings of CACDE Members on Values Related to Declining Enrollment Issues

CACDE Member	Basic Skills	Enrichment	Total Cost	Staff Disruption	Neighborhood Schools	Equality of Facil.	Social Action
Chairman (CH)	3.33	3.67	3.33	1.67	1.33	3.67	3.33
PTA-North A (NA)	2.67	2.67	2.67	1.33	1.67	4.00	2.33
PTA-North B (NB)	2.33	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.67	2.00	1.67
PTA-Central A (CA)	2.00	3.33	3.00	1.67	2.67	3.00	2.33
PTA-Central B (CB)	2.00	4.33	3.00	1.33	2.33	4.00	4.00
PTA-South A (SA)	2.00	3.00	1.33	2.33	5.00	1.33	2.00
PTA-South B (SB)	2.00	3.67	1.67	2.33	5.00	1.33	2.33
Teach Assoc. A (TA)	2.33	3.00	1.00	5.00	3.67	2.00	1.67
Teach Assoc. B (TB)	1.67	3.33	1.33	5.00	4.33	2.33	2.67
Citizens Educ. (CE)	3.67	4.00	3.33	1.33	2.33	4.33	3.00
League of W.V. (WV)	4.00	2.33	5.00	1.67	1.00	3.67	1.67
Taxpayers (TP)	3.33	2.00	5.00	1.33	1.67	4.67	1.67
Black Citizens (BC)	1.67	2.00	1.67	1.67	2.00	1.67	5.00
Community Schl.(CS)	3.33	5.00	3.00	2.33	2.67	3.00	2.67
Mean Values	2.52	3.24	2.74	2.21	2.74	2.93	2.60
Standard Deviations	.72	.86	1.26	1.24	1.30	1.15	.98
Rank Order	6	1	3.5	7	3.5	2	5
(# Above / below)	4/10	10/4	8/7	2/12	4/10	8/7	4/10

Results

The means of the value concerns for the seven values, at the bottom of Table 1, indicates that for this committee as a whole the rank order of values was as follows:

First	Enrichment
Second	Equality of Facilities
Third (Tied)	Total Cost
Third (Tied)	Neighborhood Schools
Fifth	Social Action
Sixth	Basic Skills
Seventh	Staff Disruption

It is also useful to examine the standard deviations of the value positions of the committee, also presented at the bottom of Table 1. The issue with the highest standard deviation, and hence the issue which was most controversial was Neighborhood Schools (S.D. = 1.30). Also controversial were the issues of Total Cost (S.D. = 1.26), Staff Disruption (S.D. = 1.24) and Equality of Facilities (S.D. = 1.15).

From this analysis is can be expected that the CACDE would come in with recommendations reaffirming the value of the Enrichment Experience for children which would be a relatively non-controversial issue within the committee. The Committee could also be expected to reach recommendations favoring greater Equality of Facilities though these recommendations would be likely to be more controversial.

Table 2

Intercorrelation of Seven Value Concerns Among CACDE Members

	Total Cost	Basic Skills	Equality of Facil.	Enrich-ment	Social Action	Staff Disruption	Neighbor. Schools
Total Cost	1.00	.79	.78	-.14	-.21	-.64	-.77
Basic Skills	.79	1.00	.60	-.02	-.36	-.34	-.64
Equality of Facilities	.78	.60	1.00	.07	.00	-.50	-.74
Enrichment	-.14	-.02	.07	1.00	-.36	.05	.23
Social Action	-.21	-.36	.00	-.36	1.00	-.25	-.20
Staff Disruption	-.64	-.34	-.50	.05	-.25	1.00	.59
Neighborhood Schools	-.77	-.64	-.74	.23	-.20	.59	1.00

On the other hand two values, Total Cost and Neighborhood Schools, would be very controversial within the committee and both would be strongly supported within the committee.

Values which would receive short shrift within the committee would be Staff Disruption, Basic Skills, and Social Action. Any committee recommendations could be expected to be at the cost of these three values.

The intercorrelations among the seven value concerns among the 14 members of the CACDE are presented in Table 2. The order of the values has been rearranged to reflect the structure of the correlation matrix.

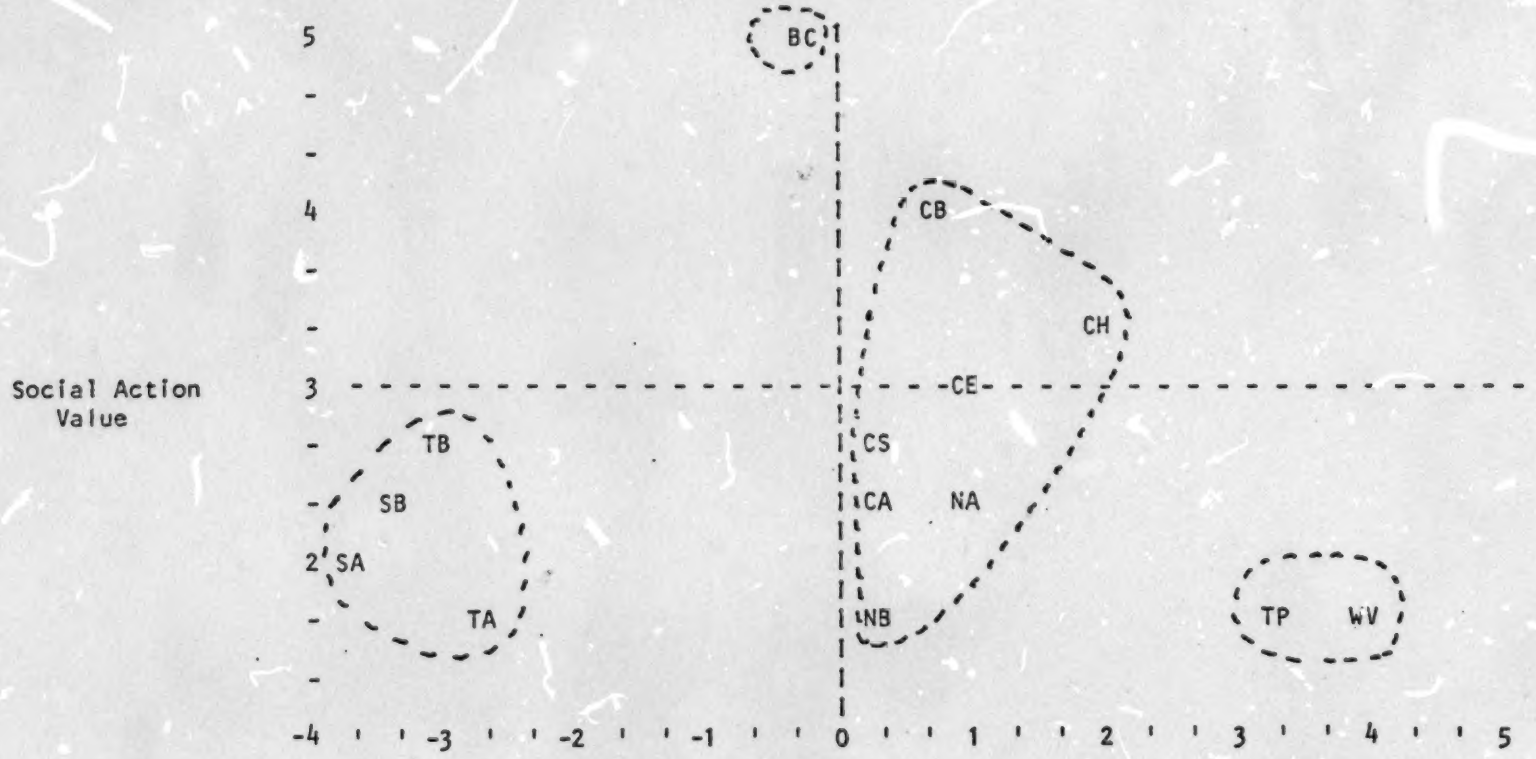
From the correlation matrix it can be seen that the three values of Total Cost, Basic Skills and Equality of Facilities generally went together and were opposed by the values of Staff Disruption and Neighborhood Schools. Social Action tended to be a different dimension unrelated to either end of what we will call the "Cost vs. Neighborhood School" dimension. The Enrichment Value was generally not related to the other values.

A Factor Analysis confirmed this general structure with one factor predominating, the Cost vs. Neighborhood School Factor, with a second factor of Social Action and a Unique factor for Enrichment.

Since there was relatively little controversy over the Enrichment dimension, the CACDE members were analyzed further with respect to the two major dimensions only. Figure 1 gives a plot of the CACDE members on the two dimensions of Cost vs. Neighborhood School on the horizontal dimension and value for Social Action on the vertical dimension.

Figure 1

Plot of CACDE Members on Total Cost Minus Neighborhood School Values versus Social Action Value



Four groups can be seen to be deliminated in this two dimensional space. Four people were low on low on Social Action and were on the Neighborhood School side of the Cost vs. Neighborhood School axis. Two of these people were representatives from the Teachers Association and the other two were from the PTA-South. In this connection it should be noted that the declining enrollment issue was much more serious for the people from the South side of the city since the elementary school population in their area had declined some 41 percent while in the Central section the decline was only 12 percent and it was 19 percent in the North side. These four people then were strongly for retaining all schools open.

In the center of the figure are seven people including the Chairman, the PTA North and South representatives and the Community Schools and the Citizens for Education representative. These people were all more concerned with Total Cost than they were with Neighborhood Schools. Of the seven, only two were clearly concerned with Social Action while four were not.

At the top of the figure, one person, the representative from the Black Citizens group, was highly concerned with Social Action and was neutral to slightly on the Neighborhood Schools side of the other dimension.

In the lower right of the figure, two people, one from the League of Women Voters and the other from the Taxpayers Association, were very little interested in Social Action and very much interested in the Total Cost value rather than in Neighborhood Schools.

It is useful to note, refering back to Table 1, that the Teachers Association representatives were very highly interested in the value of Staff Disruption, but that they were alone in this interest with the other twelve committee members having low interest in this value.

The four groups noted in the Figure 1 were the essential actors of the committee deliberations. We can name these four groups "Neighborhood School Group", "Social Action Group", "Central Group" and "Cost Conscious Group".

Dynamics of Committee Operations

In the first few weeks of the committee meetings one of the Cost Conscious people recommended that five of the 23 elementary schools be closed. He pointed out that all of the children would fit into the remaining 18 schools and that this would save about $750,000 per year in operating costs. The Neighborhood School people felt that it was not the responsibility of the committee to make recommendations, but merely to establish communication channels between the School Committee and the Citizens. The committee should explore alternatives, gather data, and present the whole result to the School Committee for their decisions.

One of the Central Group presented a plan for a series of six studies, with recommendations made after each study. This plan was adopted with the proviso (sponsored by the Neighborhood School Group) that any votes on recommendations be tentative "straw votes" until the end of the entire series of six studies.

The six studies were:

Study I	Definition of Excess
Study II	How to Utilize the Excess
Study III	Define Closing Criteria
Study IV	Alternatives to Ease the Impact of Closing
Study V	Other Educational Uses
Study VI	Other Non-Educational Uses.

The committee then scheduled the six studies in sequence, allowing about three weeks for each. For each there was two or three weeks allocated, with interspersed public hearings. Toward the end of the time period, specific recommendations were proposed for each study area. At the end of the entire six studies, the recommendations for each study were gone over and coordinated. For most of the voting, the committee was split with the usual final voting pattern eight or nine to five or four. Generally the Neighborhood School Group voted in the minority, with the Central Group and the Cost Conscious Group voting in the majority. The single member Social Action Group was absent from most of the meetings, when present he usually voted with the Neighborhood School Group.

Despite the generally working majority of the Central Group and the Cost Conscious Group there were very many struggles within this majority over the details. These controversies within the majority usually centered around how much "Enrichment" was to be included in the recommendations. From the factor analysis, the third factor, after Cost Consciousness vs Neighborhood Schools and Social Action was Enrichment. Hence it is understandable that many of the issues in the committee would revolve around this third factor after the first two factors were generally settled.

The Recommendations

The recommendations to the School Committee from the Citizens Advisory Committee on Declining Enrollment are summarized below.

1. Each elementary school should have sufficient classrooms to provide enough homerooms for their children using the current city-wide Pupil-Teacher ratio plus a resource room for about every seven homerooms needed.

2. The Committee found that there were inequalities in space available among the elementary schools and in order to equalize the space available the School Committee should redistrict among contiguous districts where feasible and should encourage a voluntary open enrollment policy. The open enrollment policy should encourage registration at defined under-utilized schools.

3. The School Committee should develop a long-range plan for dealing with declining enrollment, including consolidation of schools. Included in any long-range plan for consolidation of schools should be the establishment of standards and implementation of plans to equalize the environmental quality of the remaining educational facilities throughout the city.

4. Where there exists an excess of space in the system or in a school after meeting the requirements of 1. above, consolidation of schools should be considered. Consolidation of schools may involve closing a low population school or absorbing children into a low population school from elsewhere. Time for a period of community adjustment before any consolidation plan is implemented is considered imperative.

Guidlines which the School Committee must consider in developing it plan for school consolidation are:

A No school should operate at less than 50% capacity.

B When schools are to be consolidated this should be done with minimal

possible disruption of students, i.e. maximizing the number of students who can walk to their new school.

C. Consideration in choosing which schools to consolidate should be given to the relative cost savings.

D. It is assumed that all neighborhoods place value on their schools. Therefor, consideration of city-wide concerns is a basis for decisions dealing with declining enrollment.

E. Consideration should be given to the capacity of the receiving school, or schools, to absorb the students without exceeding the space requirements (See 1. above).

F. It is recommended that the utilization or disposition of a school building be a factor in a decision to close a school.

5. The School Committee should accept the concept of "School Consolidation" rather than the concept of "School Closing" in its thinking and planning for specific school consolidation. Essentially this concept implies that as much as possible the teachers, volunteers, and parents of all schools being consolidated should be involved in the planning of programs in the consolidated school regardless of which physical building will house the consolidated school.

6. The School Committee should initiate studies, planning and action so that school consolidation, if necessary may be undertaken by September 1976. The decision that an elementary school must be closed should be made first without reference to any particular school. The School Department and School Committee should establish criteria which can be used to measure and compare the performance of education taking place in any school.

7. The School Committee should consider proposals for use of excess space funded by State and Federal agencies. Included for consideration are proposals

for Metropolitan Approaches to Education, Special Education, Adult Education and Magnet Schools.

8. The School Committee is urged to recommend to the city administration that the Planning Department develop proposals in response to citizen needs and input for alternative uses for school buildings under consideration for closing. If community use is not possible, it is preferable that the school building be leased to other educational programs.

9. Any decision to consolidate schools should not be influenced by existing programs utilizing excess space; however, in the consolidation process every effort shall be made to relocate programs where there is demonstrated need.

The Committee wishes to reafirm the principle that excess space in a school is at the disposal of the system, not the individual school. Hence, the School Committee should direct the Suprintendent to implement the concept of appropriate uses for excess space in a school which has excess space and is not to be consolidated.

School Committee Action

The School Committee accepted the CACDE recommendations in general. They asked the Superintendent to begin the development of a long-range plan and to include in this plan school redistricting. They also asked the Superintendent to examine several possible schools with respect to their feasibility for school consolidation. The Superintendent returned with information on three possible schools which were feasible for consolidation as of September 1976. The School Committee voted to consolidate two schools and to close one building. These two schools each had less than 50 percent utilization and the entire population of both schools could fit into one building while still allowing for the recommended ratio of one resource room for each seven

classrooms. However the School Committee took little actions on the other CACDE recommendations.

Aftermath

The election in November 1975 was a heatedly contested one with two major citizens groups contesting and supporting candidates for School Committee. In this town an incumbent on the Committee had never been defeated in the past twenty years. Hence most attention was placed on the contest for the seat of one of the School Committeement who was resigning to run for Board of Aldermen.

In this town there are eight elected School Committeemen, one residing in each of the city's eight wards but elected city-wide, and the Mayor ex officio. Before the election there were two people on the school committee with strong values emphasizing Cost Consciousness and Basic Education, with the other seven (including the Mayor) representing value systems similar to the Central group on the CACDE. One of the two Cost Conscious School Committeemen came from the South Side of the city where elementary schools were in danger of being closed. He was a strong advocate of not closing any elementary schools at this time. He pointed out that while closing a school would save on the order of $120,000 per year, he knew over a million and a half per year could be saved in the operations of the central School Department operations. Until these savings were made he would not support closing a neighborhood school.

Both Cost Conscious School Committee members voted against the decision to close a particular school by September 1976.

The majority on the School Committee put a great deal of effort in supporting a candidate with values similar to their own for the "open" seat created by the retirement of one of their number. They raised and spent

over $5,000 for that campaign. They also mounted a strong campaign to unseat one of the two Cost Conscious members, the one from the North Side of the city. They felt that he was vulnerable since by voting to keep a South Side school open he was going against his cost conscious image without the support of voters from his own area. No candidate was put forth against the South Side Cost Conscious Committeeman since it was recognized that he was too strong to defeat.

A full slate of candidates was fielded by the opposing citizens group including the two incumbent Cost Conscious members and six candidates for the other positions. While an especially strong candidate ran for the "open" slot, emphasis was given to the entire slate and strong candidates were run against all incumbents of the majority.

The campaign was fought on two issues, Cost Consciousness, Basic Skills, and Neighborhood Schools on one side versus Enrichment, Social Action, and central value positions on the other values. In terms of Figure 1, it is as if the two extreme groups, the Cost Conscious group and the Neighborhood School group opposed the Central group.

The results of the election were quite interesting. The Cost Conscious and Neighborhood School people elected six of their candidates, defeating all but one of the Central incumbents. They lost the campaign for the "open" seat by a few hundred votes and one incumbent, a former chairman who had the greatest longevity on the School Committee survived. After the election there was a six to three majority for the Neighborhood School - Cost Conscious group vs. the Enrichment and Social Value group. Before the election the ratio had been two to seven. This is the first time since the city was incorporated as a city over a hundred years ago that more than one incumbent school committee member had been defeated.

After taking office, the new School Committee rescinded the closing of the South Side elementary school scheduled for the Fall of 1976. They also ordered the Superintendent to come in with a budget recommendation with no increase over last year's budget. This required a "swallowing" of over two-and-a-half million dollars of increase built into the budget by contracted increases in salaries, increases in medical insurance, and other such increases. The Superintendent was able to make such a recommendation but at the cost of nearly 100 jobs in the system. This "zero increase" budget was adopted with only very minor changes. The new school committee also voted not to increase the METCO program which involves Boston Black students attending the City schools and cancelled a "Metropolitan Pair-ways" program which would have sent fifth grades from one school into Boston paired with Black students from Boston.

Plans are now underway to convert the school which had been scheduled to close (which is operating at about one-third capacity) into a magnet school emphasizing "Basic Skills".

Conclusion

The Values Approach used in this paper does seem to provide an understanding of the dynamics of school policy decision-making not only in declining enrollment problems but in other areas as well. By plotting people and committee members into the value-space it is possible to see groupings and to detect expected coalitions. While in the CACDE there was a clear opposition between Cost Consciousness and Neighborhood School Concerns, this was not the case at the level of the School Committee where other options such as reducing the School Administration Central Office were possible to save much more money than would be saved by closing neighborhood schools.

In this community, the declining enrolment problem has not yet been dealt with and the new school committee will at some point have to face it.